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ABSTRACT

In response to concerns about the adequacy of the preparation provided for reading specialists in light of the duties spelled out for them in a 1977 Wisconsin statute, a study was undertaken to obtain perceptions of the responsibilities of reading professionals from Wisconsin school administrators and reading specialists. A total of 253 administrators and 253 reading professionals (59% response rate) completed a survey form on which administrators indicated their perceptions of the importance of each of 36 items, while reading professionals indicated the adequacy of their training for each item. The items were related to reading teachers' credentials and experience and to their job, interpersonal, administrative, and coordination skills. Analysis of the results revealed a wide discrepancy between the high importance attached to all the items by administrators and the self-perceived adequacy of the reading professionals' training. There were only two items for which the ratings reflecting adequacy of training were higher than the ratings reflecting the importance attached to the items by administrators. (GT)

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The Wisconsin State Reading Association Studies Chapter 29 and Reading in the State

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Background of the Study

In 1977 Chapter 29 of the statutes of the State of Wisconsin was signed into law. This Chapter required each school district in the state of Wisconsin to employ a reading specialist with the beginning of the 1978-79 school term and in addition it spelled out some required duties of the reading specialist so employed. Such duties as "develop a reading curriculum K-12," "act as a resource person to classroom teachers," and "coordinate the reading curriculum" were some duties specifically mentioned in the law. In February 1978 the Wisconsin State Reading Association issued Informational Brief Number II which suggested some criteria for selecting a K-12 Reading Specialist to carry out the intent of the law, since it was clear that successful implementation depended on careful selection of professionals to do the reading job. This informational brief highlighted such things as credentials and technical knowledge the person should bring to the job and other job, interpersonal, and administrative skills needed to implement the intent of Chapter 29.

The requirements of the new state law and the informational brief of the Wisconsin State Reading Association both signaled a re-definition of the role of the reading specialist. Now the reading specialist was expected to do more coordinating, administering and "resource-support" than before the passage of Chapter 29, and was expected to work more with staff and less with direct instruction in reading. The addition of responsibilities to the role of the reading specialist and the change in role prompted concern about the preparation provided for reading specialists to meet the demands of their new role. A major question raised was:

"Do reading specialists feel adequately prepared to undertake the tasks and assume the roles described in the law and in the information brief?"

Other questions with regard to the role re-definition faced school administrators charged with hiring the reading specialist and assigning their duties under the law. "Are all duties and responsibilities of equal importance?" "Are there other roles for reading specialists in addition to those spelled out in the law?"

These questions and concerns caused Dr. Russ Burgett, then President of the Wisconsin State Reading Association, to suggest that a study be undertaken by the association to gain some information that might be helpful to reading specialists and school administrators in the implementation of Chapter 29 reading requirements in the state. The Committee on Research on Certification was charged with the task of coordinating such a study in the summer of 1978. Work began immediately and was continued when Dr. Dave Gustafson assumed leadership of the association.

Design of the Study

A survey instrument was designed by the Committee on Research on Certification to gather perceptions of the responsibilities of the reading professional from administrators and reading specialists. The final form of the instrument contained 36 items which the responders were to check or rate on a 1-5 scale as being important (administrators) or the adequacy of training (reading specialists). One was lowest rating and five was highest. The survey instrument was divided into five parts. Part one asked for credential information with a "yes," "no" reaction to whether such things as holding Wisconsin Certificate 317, at least three years of successful teaching experience and membership in professional reading organizations (local, state, or national) were important. Parts two through four asked responders to rate "job skills," "interpersonal skills," and"administrative skills" on a

1-5 scale with one being low and five being high. Separate columns were provided for administrators and reading professionals. The administrator column instructions were, "rate the requirements of the role/responsibility in reading." The reading professional column instructions were, "rate the adequacy of your training." The first four sections of the survey instrument were based heavily on criteria suggested in Informational Brief II (Wisconsin State Reading Association, Feb. 1978) for selecting a K-12 Reading Specialist.

A fifth section was added to the instrument by the committee to gather perceptions of importance (administrators) and adequacy of training (reading specialists) with regard to coordination skills. Responders were asked to rate such items as coordination with (1) title I reading programs, (2) LD programs, (3) ED/LD programs, (4) Homebound programs, (5) EMR programs, (6) Gifted/talented programs, and (7) coordination/service on multi-disciplinary teams.

Two survey forms and one return envelope were mailed to every school administrator in the state of Wisconsin. Administrators were asked to fill out one form, have their reading professional do the same, and return both forms in the enclosed return envelope.

Results

433 school districts received survey forms and 506 were returned (253 from administrators and 253 from reading professionals). This is a return rate of 59 per cent. Results were tallied separately for administrators and for reading professionals.

Results for part one of the survey, which asked for credential information with "yes" indicating the item is perceived as important and "no" indicating the item is perceived as unimportant are summarized in Table I below.

TABLE I

Credential Information

	Adm.		Reading Prof.	
	Y.	N.	Y.	N.
1. Wisconsin Certificate 317	149	42	203	15
2. At least 3 years successful teaching experience	187	13	213	3
3. Member of professional reading organizations	125	63	174	21

It appears that school administrators are less inclined to see credentialling as important than the reading professionals though this is not a clear cut result since not all respondents marked choices in part one. Administrators especially were likely to leave all or part of this section blank. With regard to survey item (3) on membership in professional reading organizations it is evident that state reading organizations are favored with 112 administrators and 160 reading professionals indicating that membership is important. Local membership was rated next, with 96 administrators and 145 reading professionals giving importance to membership in local reading organizations. Membership in reading organizations at the national level was indicated as being important by 63 administrators and 140 reading professionals.

In section two of the survey administrators and reading professionals were asked to rate a listing of job skills on a 1 - 5 scale with one being low and 5 being high. Directions differed slightly as administrators rated in response to the importance of the role/responsibility in reading and reading professionals rated the perceived adequacy of their training to perform the role/responsibility in reading. Table 2 displays the average ratings given by each group.

TABLE 2

Average Ratings for Job Skills

	Adm.	Reading Prof.
4. Knowledge of K-12 evaluation instruments and techniques-	3.70	3.32
5. Ability to construct and interpret a reading assessment for determining reading program needs-	3.67	3.09
6. Ability to construct and interpret a reading assessment for determining student needs-	3.75	3.54
7. Working knowledge of curriculum development skills-	3.61	3.24
8. Ability to evaluate and recommend educational materials K-12-	3.51	3.41
9. Ability to provide leadership in the development and implementation of K-12 reading inservice and staff development programs-	3.78	3.04
10. Knowledge of current K-12 reading methodology and significant educational practices-	3.65	3.54

N = 253

It is evident that administrators perceive the job skills listed as generally rather important and that the reading professionals do not rate the adequacy of their training as high. In every case the average ratings given by administrators are higher than those given by the reading professionals. There were a number of unsolicited comments by the reading professionals included with the ratings of their training. Typical of these were comments like "nothing helps as much as experience!" and indications that they felt prepared to serve as reading teachers but not for the additional demands of Chapter 29. Several commented that they needed additional preparation in light of the new demands of Chapter 29.

Items relating to the interpersonal skills needed to implement the intent of Chapter 29 were included in part three of the survey. Again each group

rated on a 1-5 scale with administrators rating importance of the interpersonal skills and reading professionals the adequacy of their training in the interpersonal skills. Average ratings received are given in Table 3.

TABLE 3

Average Ratings for Interpersonal Skills

	Adm.	Reading Prof.
11. Ability to communicate verbally and in writing-	3.71	3.53
12. Initiative and persistence needed to accomplish meaningful goals-	3.86	3.37
13. Ability to create unity and enthusiasm among the staff-	3.79	3.17
14. Success in making learning interesting and challenging-	3.65	3.34
15. Desire and commitment to reading-	3.95	3.81
16. Open to considering divergent views-	3.54	3.61
17. Encouragement of staff and administration to raise questions and express opinions-	3.52	3.30
18. Treating staff members in an unbiased and impartial manner-	3.71	3.39
19. Openness toward student or community suggestions-	3.58	3.42
20. Ability to communicate with parents-	3.67	3.38
21. Ability to adjust to changes in plans-	3.59	3.35
22. Resiliency in being able to function under pressure-	3.73	3.10
23. Willingness to try new approaches or methods-	3.77	3.60
24. Enthusiasm for personal reading-	3.51	3.64

N = 253

Comments received from the reading professionals in regard to the items in this section again pointed out that experience helps very much with the development of interpersonal skills and that in-service training by the Right-to-Read effort in Wisconsin had been very helpful. Right-to-Read was mentioned several times in this connection. Again, in general it is apparent from Table 3 that administrators tend to rate the importance of the interpersonal skills higher than the reading professionals rate the adequacy of their training in the interpersonal skills listed. There are, however, two exceptions to this observation. Skills relating to openness in considering divergent views and enthusiasm for personal reading are rated higher by the reading professionals. These are the only items in the entire study where the adequacy of training is rated higher than the importance attached to the item by administrators.

Part four of the survey contained five items relating to administrative skills. Here, too, administrators and reading professionals indicated their perceptions by rating the items on a 1-6 scale. The average ratings are given in Table 4.

TABLE 4

Average Ratings for Administrative Skills

		Adm.	Reading Prof.
25.	Understanding and working knowledge of Wisconsin Statutes 115, 120, and 29 as related to public education-	3.39	2.71
26.	Knowledge of budgeting procedures and sources-	2.96	2.15
27.	Ability to effectively supervise or evaluate the total reading program-	3.72	2.85
28.	Knowledge of, and willingness to carry out tasks within the framework of district line-staff organization-	3.58	2.88
29.	Capable of acquiring knowledge on procedures of writing proposals and implementing present or future state and federal programs-	3.09	2.50

N = 253

It can be seen in Table 4 that the pattern established in the earlier parts of the survey continues to hold, that is, administrators consistently rate the importance of the role responsibilities higher than the reading professionals rate the adequacy of their training to perform the role responsibilities spelled out and expected by their administrators and the requirements of the Chapter 29 reading legislation.

The final part of the survey instrument asked responders to rate seven coordination skills. These results are given in Table 5.

TABLE 5

Average Ratings for Coordination Skills

		Adm.	Reading Prof.
30.	Coordination with Title I reading programs-	3.30	2.59
31.	Coordination with LD programs-	3.30	2.70
32.	Coordination with ED/LD programs-	3.22	2.50
33.	Coordination with Homebound programs-	3.21	1.96
34.	Coordination with EMR programs-	3.09	2.30
35.	Coordination with gifted/talented programs-	3.11	2.27
36.	Coordination/service on multi-disciplinary teams-	3.18	2.64

N = 253

There were a few comments among the responses in this section such as "We don't have a gifted/talented program" and some items were left blank. In general though the results in Table 5 show the discrepancy already noted between the ratings of administrators and reading professionals. In fact the ratings with regard to coordination skills appear to be more divergent than in any section of the survey.

In order to obtain an estimate of the significance of the differences in average ratings given by the administrators and reading professionals in this

study a t-test on mean difference of ratings was run. For this test it was assumed that the ratings were "scores" given by the raters to items on the survey and thus were continuous data. Two tests were run, one on parts two through four of the survey (items 4 -29) and one on part five of the survey (items 30-36). The first test related to items dealing with skills mentioned rather specifically in the Wisconsin State Reading Association, Informational Brief II and the second test with items added to the survey by the Committee on Research on Certification.

The use of the t-test on mean difference technique indicated that the difference of the ratings given by administrators and reading professionals is very significant. The first test yielded a t value of 4.409 which is significant beyond the .01 level. The second test was even more dramatic as it yielded a t value of -7.498, also significant beyond the .01 level.

Discussion

It is obvious that there is a wide discrepancy between the perceptions of administrators, who view all items in the study of role responsibilities of the reading specialist in light of Chapter 29 as important, and the perceptions of the reading professionals of the adequacy of their training to perform these role responsibilities. The results of the survey indicate this rather clearly as do two illustrative comments received among the survey returns. One administrator commented, "I rate everything 5 but it is an honest rating because all are important." A reading professional commented, "I feel adequately trained as a reading teacher, but I was not prepared to do all this!"

It also seems apparent that the passage of Chapter 29 in Wisconsin has "changed the ball game" so to speak with regard to the role of the reading specialist. More and new demands are being placed on the reading professional.

More training and better training and preparation needs to be made available to reading professionals. This means that more in-service help should be provided to everyone charged with implementing the intent of Chapter 29. It means also that institutions preparing reading specialists and other teachers are going to have to examine and up-grade their preparation programs to provide better services to professionals and better professionals.

The challenge, it seems, is to all facets of reading and reading organizations. This survey seems to have uncovered the following situation:

(1) We recognize the challenge to us all posed in Chapter 29.

(2) We know reading and Chapter 29 is very important.

(3) We are nervous about our preparation to do the job we are being asked to do.

In short, we see that we have a big, important job to do in Wisconsin.

NOTES

Members of the Committee on Research on Certification Committee during this study were: Robert McKeag, Oshkosh, Chair, Eunice Bethke, Madison, Jean Caudle, Oshkosh, Joan Clements, La Crosse, Pauline Witte, Waunakee, Phylis Foxgrover, Kaukauna, Louis Deners, Menominee, Art Schoeller, Milwaukee, and John Bricco, Green Bay.

References

V. V. Garry, "Competencies that Count Among Reading Specialists," Journal of Reading, May, 1974.

Wisconsin State Reading Association, Informational Brief II, February 1, 1978.

Ratings Tally for Administrators(A) and

Reading Professionals(RP)

	1 (low)		2		3		4		5 (high)	
	A	RP	A	RP	A	RP	A	RP	A	RP
4	3	5	4	10	29	59	76	85	107	60
5	5	11	11	21	22	66	54	64	124	55
6	4	4	12	11	23	37	43	70	136	96
7	3	7	5	18	30	58	84	77	95	59
8	2	2	5	12	28	55	74	77	99	73
9	3	9	7	29	22	63	51	76	134	42
10	3	3	6	5	32	43	67	76	109	90
11	2	4	3	6	17	44	64	89	125	78
12	3	7	2	9	11	35	73	87	129	75
13	4	10	2	9	18	60	67	80	126	55
14	3	3	2	4	24	44	84	91	102	63
15	3	3	3	2	15	15	40	38	159	152
16	4	3	4	4	32	26	82	80	92	101
17	3	6	3	11	45	44	81	69	85	80
18	3	6	3	10	28	40	69	68	114	88
19	3	7	3	8	28	33	86	75	94	89
20	2	4	4	14	25	33	74	69	110	90
21	2	7	5	11	30	32	83	70	95	89
22	4	7	5	16	35	49	85	80	97	56
23	3	4	1	3	20	35	80	64	114	108
24	3	5	5	2	30	27	58	48	114	128
25	2	13	9	17	62	69	77	56	69	42
26	7	27	19	31	90	69	56	36	42	21
27	3	8	8	11	28	55	55	68	124	51
28	2	11	5	8	34	41	81	75	94	56
29	8	20	12	26	66	58	84	43	46	43
30	5	24	7	20	54	40	69	42	76	61
31	2	18	7	18	61	49	78	51	65	56
32	2	21	9	24	66	54	77	41	58	48
33	4	37	14	30	83	61	63	33	56	23
34	6	29	14	30	72	51	68	39	52	37
35	3	24	9	25	52	53	74	38	63	38
36	5	22	13	21	57	41	80	48	57	58